

Lowell-Nashua Commuter Rail Extension

Lowell, Massachusetts-Nashua, New Hampshire

(November 2002)

Description

The New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) is proposing to design and construct a 12-mile extension of an existing commuter rail line from Lowell, Massachusetts to Nashua, New Hampshire. The proposed project would extend existing commuter rail service provided by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) on an anticipated schedule of six round trips per weekday and three roundtrips on Saturdays. The proposed service extension would provide an alternative to a highly congested highway corridor and would provide traffic mitigation during the planned expansion of Route 3 in Massachusetts. The proposed project also includes the purchase of commuter rail equipment for use by the MBTA, rehabilitation of existing track, the construction of new trackage (where necessary), and a park-and-ride lot with a boarding platform near Everett Turnpike (Exit 2) in Nashua. MBTA anticipates 900 average weekday boardings at the start of service.

The Lowell, MA-Nashua, NH commuter rail extension is located in an area generally paralleling Route 3 in Massachusetts. NHDOT plans to execute an agreement with the MBTA (primary commuter rail operator in New England) to operate the commuter rail extension project. The total capital cost for the commuter rail extension project is estimated at \$40.7 million (escalated dollars), with a proposed Section 5309 New Starts share of \$18 million. Because the proposed New Starts share is less than \$25 million, the project is exempt from the New Starts criteria, and is thus not subject to FTA's evaluation and rating (49 USC 5309 (e)(8)(A)).

Summary Description	
Proposed Project:	Commuter Rail Extension; 12 miles; one station
Total Capital Cost (\$YOE):	\$40.7 million
Section 5309 New Starts Share (\$YOE):	\$18 million (44%)
Annual Operating Cost (\$1999):	\$1.7 million
Ridership Forecast (2003):	900 avg. weekday boardings
Opening Year Ridership Forecast:	N/A

Status

The Nashua Regional Planning Commission, in cooperation with the City of Nashua, NHDOT and other participatory agencies, has studied the feasibility of restoring commuter rail service to southern New Hampshire since the early 1980s. In 1999, NRPC completed a Major Investment Study that analyzed the passenger rail market, required capital investments, operational issues and several alternatives to the commuter rail extension option. In June 1999, NRPC and NHDOT selected the extension of commuter rail service from Nashua to Lowell as the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). The LPA was also included in the NRPC's long range transportation plan. FTA approved NHDOT's request to initiate Preliminary Engineering on the project in May 2000. NHDOT is currently undergoing the environmental review phase for the

proposed project and will be completed by Spring 2003. FTA is aware that the total cost for this project is anticipated to escalate beyond \$45.0 million dollars and that the NHDOT will be seeking a larger New Start share for the proposed commuter rail extension. Based on the project's anticipated change it will be removed from the New Starts exempt category. NHDOT will submit New Starts criteria and will be rated and evaluated for the FY 2005 reporting year.

Section 3030(a)(49) of TEA-21 authorizes the "Nashua, NH-Lowell, MA Commuter Rail" for Final Design and construction. Through FY 2002, Congress has appropriated \$5.93 million in Section 5309 New Starts funds for this project.

Locally Proposed Financial Plan		
<u>Proposed Source of Funds</u>	<u>Total Funding (\$ millions)</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Federal:		
Section 5309	\$18.0	44.2%
CMAQ	\$14.5	35.6%
Total:	\$40.7	100.0%

NOTE: Funding proposal reflects assumptions made by project sponsors, and are not DOT or FTA assumptions. Total may not add due to rounding.

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